saalt
SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS LEADING TOGETHER

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February 13, 2015

Larry R. Muncey
Chief
City of Madison, Alabama Police Department
100 Hughes Rd.
Madison, AL 35758

As a national South Asian American ~~leaders~~ organization supporting communities at the local level~~and national levels~~, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) in Washington, D.C. writes to express our deep concerns with the inhumane and excessive use of force that a Madison police officer used against Mr. Sureshbhai Patel on February 6th. As a result of his brutal beating at the hands of Madison police officers, Mr. Patel is partially
paralyzed.

The police department has indicated that a "communication barrier" led to the use of excessive force. Yet no amount of barriers related to communication can excuse the use of unreasonable force and violence on a resident. Moreover, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, police departments that receive federal funds are required to take steps that guarantee language access for limited English proficient (LEP) residents. It is vital that the Madison police department put into place practices and procedures that enable police officers to more effectively communicate with LEP residents.

In addition, the terrible tragedy that occurred last week has strained trust between law enforcement and members of the Indian community in Madison and surrounding areas. Mr. Patel's son, Chirag Patel, understandably feels patently unwelcome in his community, as do many other South Asian residents of Madison, and indeed questions his decision to make the city his home. His remark, "I'm totally devastated that I might have made a big mistake," reflects his concern that moving his family to Madison for a better life may have been the wrong one.

We call upon you and the City of Madison, Alabama Police Department to take the following immediate actions:

- Can we put something back in about compensating/assisting the family? ~~Take actions to discipline and terminate the employment of the officer(s) in question~~
- ~~Release to the public any audio and video tapes of the police encounter with Mr. Patel~~
- Investigate with expediency and thoroughness the reasons that led to the police encounter with Mr. Patel, what occurred during the incident, and the subsequent steps taken by the police department, including a timeline to publicly release the investigation's findings

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- Disclose current training procedures with respect to communicating and interacting with Limited English Proficient (LEP) and immigrant members of the community
    - Disclose the criteria used by the police department to determine and respond to tips of "suspicious" activity
    - Implement trainings for all police officers to more effectively respond to immigrants and LEP individuals
    - Engage regularly with and conduct outreach to South Asian community members in Madison and surrounding areas to foster trust
    - Provide a public apology to the entire Madison community for the tragedy and its consequences

SAALT also encourages the Madison Police Department to continue its relationship with local Alabama South Asian organization, AshaKiran. This relationship is critical to ensuring that this case of police brutality is handled appropriately with the community, that this does not happen again in Madison, and that the police force becomes fully prepared to interact with and protect its residents, one of ten who speak a language other than English. ~~AshaKiran members will request a meeting with the City of Madison, Alabama Police Department to discuss steps the Department can take to address and respond to South Asian community concerns in the wake of the incident.~~

Sincerely,

~~Bhavani Kakani~~ Suman Raghunathan
Executive Director
~~AshaKiran~~ South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

CC:

Vanita Gupta, United States Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights
Aditi Hardikar, White House Office of Public Engagement
Representative Mo Brooks

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Senator Jefferson Sessions
Senator Richard Shelby
Mayor Troy Trulock